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Bowen, Clarence Winthrop

Christopher Columbus. 1492.—1892

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1492. - - 1892.

BY

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258

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The following letter, regarding the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, was written from Madrid, Spain, and published in *The Independent* of May 31, 1883.

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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

1492-1892.

The four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus is not far off. It is not to be believed that the fourth centennial of an event that has been of such vast importance to human affairs will be passed by without some public ceremonies. What they should be, it is, perhaps, too early to suggest; but what the country to which belong the honor and glory of the discovery of the New World thinks of such a celebration may not be without interest. The object of this article is, therefore, to show the opinions in Spain regarding this subject.

JUAN FACUNDO RIAÑO.

One of the most widely known and highly esteemed gentlemen in Spain is the Director-General of Public Instruction and the Arts, His Excellency, Don Juan F. Riaño. Both as a scholar and as a member of the Cortes, whatever Señor Riaño says always attracts attention. The following is his reply to some questions put to him:

“I respond with the greatest pleasure to the invitation which you have had the kindness to extend to me to express my opinions regarding the place where the anniversary of the discovery of America ought to be celebrated in 1892, as well as the manner in which that important and international celebration should be held.

“I believe that two localities have indisputable and prior claims—viz., the birthplace of Columbus, or the spot where he first disembarked on the shores of the New World. But is the town in which Columbus was born known to-day beyond a doubt? Or is the precise place of his disembarkation known? Neither of these two questions has yet met with a solution which can fully satisfy the demands of modern investigation. From the time that Don Fernando Columbus, son of the illustrious mariner,

wrote the biography of his father until the present day, various towns in the vicinity of Genoa have disputed among themselves for the honor of being the birthplace of Columbus, and other cities of Italy have also made the same claim. Nor have historians even yet fixed with positive certainty the exact point of his disembarkation. From the time that Fray Bartolome de las Casas, almost a contemporary of Columbus, wrote an account of the course pursued during the first voyage, up to the publication in Washington last year of 'An Attempt to Solve the Problem,' by the scholarly Anglo-American, C. P. Patterson, no one, not even this same Mr. Patterson, has yet designated, with the conclusive proofs which the undertaking requires, the exact situation of San Salvador, where so glorious an event occurred. Genoa, San Domingo, Havana, etc., etc., could consequently, make respectable claims to be chosen as the place for celebrating the grand jubilee; but it is impossible to determine the exact locality either of his birth or of his landing on the 12th of October, 1492.

"Perhaps, in the nine years which shall intervene before the great festival, there will be published new studies which will establish the certainty of these two questions so much discussed; but, meanwhile, I have to propose to the consideration of those who are directly interested in the anniversary, another locality, which also has special and superior claims.

"Lost in the hope of carrying out his undertaking in other countries, Columbus came to Spain and sought the favor of Ferdinand and Isabella in support of his project. Yet these Catholic sovereigns, having experienced the sufferings of a war which they were bringing to a decisive close, could not give help to projects of new and foreign conquests until the Moors of Granada were finally subdued. Their capitulation in 1491 and occupation of the city of Granada by their Catholic majesties on the 2d of January, 1492, constituted, in my opinion, the exclusive occasions which decided the voyage of Columbus to

America. Without these previous successes on the part of the sovereigns, the most glorious and important event which history discloses, the discovery of the New World, would have been indefinitely postponed.

“In Santa Fe de la Vega, in Granada, on the 17th of April, 1492, and in Granada on the 30th of the same month, the Catholic sovereigns conferred upon Christopher Columbus the title of admiral, viceroy, and governor of the seas and lands which he might discover; and the same Columbus, after receiving these honors and the means for undertaking the voyage, left the city of Granada, Saturday, the 12th of May, 1492. I know of no other city which has greater claims to be chosen as the place where the world shall gather to express its honors for the memory of Columbus. In Granada the project which resulted in the discovery of America was resolved upon. In Granada rest the ashes of the noble monarchs to whom the world is under obligations for such extraordinary achievements. In Granada stands the palace of the Moorish kings, where the mariner took leave of his protectors in order to cross the ocean; and upon the walls of this wonder of art might be inscribed, with greater significance than anywhere else, the words *Fauto Monta*, the emblem of the Old World, and *Plus Ultra*, the promise of the new, which the glorious enthusiasm and intrepidity of Columbus presented as a royal gift to the sovereigns of Spain. Were it necessary to develop more fully the fact that Granada offers a situation without equal in Europe, and were it needful to recall to mind its monuments, its history, its traditions, and whatever it contains of beauty and grandeur, I should only refer to those distinguished historians, William H. Prescott and Washington Irving, whose names are forever linked with the memory of Columbus and of the City of the Moors.

“In what way the anniversary should be celebrated is a problem, in my opinion more difficult than that of determining the locality. In it are included the different exercises which are observed in such festivals; and, besides, it is necessary to have an idea of all the attending

circumstances; of the time and day of the year which should be preferred; of the nations which should be invited, and of all the other details which must be included in such a project.

“As a part of the programme, I am at present inclined to think that a number of handsome awards should be given for special services; for example, pensions for life should be bestowed, without reference to nationality, upon those who have distinguished themselves in laborious and difficult voyages and discoveries on land or sea, and other prizes or medals should be given for scientific and industrial labors connected with the progress made in geography. These and kindred subjects should be combined with the celebration of the anniversary; and if the idea of choosing Granada should be accepted, excursions should be made to Santa Fé, Cordova, Rabida, Palos, and other points of Andalusia and the rest of Spain, with which the life of Columbus is connected; and particularly to Seville, where you will see in a special library the books pertaining to the history and work of Columbus, and where exist autographs and other important documents upon America in the archives of the Indies.”

THE DUKE OF VERAGUA.

At Señor Riaño's request, and with a letter of introduction from him, I next called upon the representative of the family of Columbus, His Excellency, the Duke of Veragua. I was ushered by servants into one apartment after another, and had time enough to observe something of the style in which the Duke lives. On his immense ancestral estates the Duke raises hundreds of the finest bulls in Spain, many of which are slaughtered each year in the famous Bull Rings at Madrid and Seville. His bulls are fiercer and cost more than the ordinary bulls one sees in the Ring; and when it is announced that the Duke of Veragua's bulls are to fight, even larger crowds than usual throng the amphitheatres. In one of the rooms was a large painting, representing some bulls in the field, with the Duke, on horseback, chasing one of them. In other

parts of the room were portraits of famous *matadors* who lived years ago. In the reception room, near portraits of the Duke's beautiful wife and mother, was the picture of a famous *matador* who lived in the time of Charles IV. The Duke is a fine looking gentleman, of medium height, and about forty years old. The expression of his face, and particularly of the mouth, is said very much to resemble the features of his renowned ancestor, and the resemblance to the original portrait of Columbus at the National Library is striking. Being a Grandee, with a dozen or more Spanish titles, the Duke belongs to the hereditary portion of the Senate, where he is a constant attendant. As he also attends personally to the management of his several estates, he may be called a hard-working man. When I suggested how much he would see of interest to him in America, and how much the people would enjoy a visit from the only living descendent of Christopher Columbus, he replied that he had too much work to do at home, and the Spaniards were poor travelers; they left sight-seeing to the Anglo-Saxon race.

In reply to several questions, the Duke said he would be very much interested in any celebration that would take place in 1892. He thought that not only Spain and the nations of America should participate, but also Italy—the country which had given birth to Columbus; and that England, France, and the other nations of Europe, which contributed so largely toward populating the New World, should likewise be included. Instead of having the celebration at San Salvador, where Columbus first saw land at 10 o'clock at night on that famous eleventh of October, or even in New York, he thought Spain was the most appropriate place; and he favored Madrid, as the centre of Spain. His idea would be to have one celebration, to which all the nations interested might contribute, thus making it one of the grandest and largest *fêtes* ever held in the world; but he did not favor several celebrations, which might be held in different countries at the same time. The Duke explained how, in the festivities to be held at Madrid, could

be represented in procession the historical scenes in the life of the Discoverer; but instead of going into further details, he suggested that an audience with the King should be obtained.

EMILIO CASTELAR.

Meanwhile I could not fail to call upon a gentleman who is better known to Americans than any other man in Spain, Señor Don Emilio Castelar. The name of the philosopher, scholar, orator, and statesman is a household word throughout Spain. When reproached, a few years since, for the failure of the grand idea of his life, a republic in Spain, his reply was: "I am a Spaniard first; a republican afterward." Patriotism, then, is a passion with Castelar, and whatever affects the welfare and glory of the Peninsula is of absorbing interest to him. When the subject of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America was introduced, he said that was an idea in which Spaniards were particularly interested, and he likewise felt that Portugal, Italy, England, France, and the countries of America would wish to contribute to a celebration in 1892. As the United States holds friendly relations with all these nations, and as whatever steps she might take in this or any other matter would have a great weight, he would be glad to see our own country take a leading part in an event of such vast magnitude as the anniversary of the discovery of the New World would be. As he was to address the Athenaeum, a leading literary society of Spain, the coming year, and had chosen "Columbus" as his subject, he would avail himself of that occasion to impress upon the king the importance of the anniversary and the necessity of celebrating it in as grand and becoming a manner as possible.

When asked what would be his ideas regarding the program for the celebration, Castelar without hesitation spoke with a rapidity, beauty, and eloquence of language such as one seldom hears. An outline of the vivid picture he drew may be given as follows:

"Instead of celebrating in any one place, which would

necessarily be local in character, I would have all the nations interested so combine as to make this anniversary the most memorable and the grandest ever held in the history of the world. In Genoa, as the city of Columbus's birth, the initiative should be taken. Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, England and the United States should be properly represented. Then let each of these nations send a vessel or several vessels of their own, beautifully equipped and with representatives officially accredited to the seaport of Palos, in Granada, where upon the 3d of August should occur, after suitable ceremonies, the departure of this international fleet for the island of San Salvador. As all the nations mentioned have contributed so much to America in years and centuries gone by, and are now so vitally interested in her present welfare, there would be a unity of interest in the voyage that would be really remarkable. The fleet should stop at the Canary Islands, and in further imitation of the course pursued by Christopher Columbus, should proceed on its way to San Salvador. How memorable the anniversary of the discovery of land would be and how many ways to commemorate it at once occur to mind! I should be glad to see the fleet visit some of the points of historical and commercial interest in the Western Hemisphere. At New York the ceremonies, I am sure, would be imposing. The concluding ceremonies should be, I think, at Barcelona in our own country, and something like the magnificent festivities of the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella should be repeated in memory of the great discoverer; for

“‘*A Castilla y a Leon
Nuevo mundo dio Colon.*’”

“The government of Spain, I am sure,” continued Señor Castelar, “would contribute its share of the expense; and, to add to the popularity of the festival, I would favor public subscriptions, to which all might contribute. We would thus be enabled to provide for the suitable entertainment of foreign vessels with the representatives of the different nations while visiting our own

shores, and I believe the other nations would each subscribe its share of the expense. As a member of the Cortes, I will do all I can in this direction. But public sentiment should first be aroused by means of the press. When the people throughout the different nations are thoroughly awakened to the magnitude of the anniversary, they will seek in some way to carry into effect their ideas regarding the celebration. Societies could be formed which might exert an important influence. Finally, the governments themselves would wish to be officially represented, and the great event of 1892 would be celebrated with enthusiasm."

THE KING OF SPAIN.

Through the courtesy of the Hon. Dwight T. Reed, the *Chargé d'Affaires* of the United States in Spain, who applied through the Secretary of State, the Marquis de la Vega de Amijo, for a private audience, I, to-day, had a most interesting interview with His Majesty, Alphonso XII. But there is so much red tape required to secure an interview with the King that one is convinced of the truth of the Spanish proverb: "*Las cosas de Palacio van despacio.*" In one of the magnificent reception rooms of the most beautiful palace in all Europe, the King and Queen received Mr. Reed and myself, and, after the usual introduction, the King shook hands, bade us be seated, and at once began to ask a score or more of questions. He wished to know the views of the Duke of Veragua, of Castelar, and Riaño regarding the anniversary in 1892. At first he thought that nine years was a long time to spend in arranging for the celebration, but perhaps not too long considering the importance of the anniversary.

"It is an event," continued His Majesty, "in which all the world would be interested, and in which the leading nations might unite. I would do all in my power to make it a brilliant festival; but, considering the pre-eminent part that Spain took in the discovery of America, I claim that she should certainly be allowed to have the celebration within her own borders. Italy gave birth to Colum-

bus, it is true. Other countries considered his ideas only visionary schemes. But it was Spain alone that furnished the means for carrying into practical effect what would otherwise have been only a dream. To Spain alone, therefore, belongs the credit of the discovery. Instead of several celebrations, in different countries, I should favor, for the reasons given, one grand anniversary in Spain. Either Madrid, Granada, Huelva, or Barcelona would be a suitable place. Barcelona, because it is an important commercial town, easy of access by sea from Italy, and connected so closely with an important event in the life of Columbus; Granada, because its historical associations are so many; but, above all, I would prefer Huelva, a growing and important city of which Palos is the harbor. It was Huelva that furnished the mast for the vessel in which Columbus first sailed. With rich mines on one side of the town and a good harbor on the other, Huelva is so situated that all the foreign vessels could be accommodated that came to participate in the celebration. A very large and handsome hotel, which is to-day opened for the first time to the public, is perhaps an indication of what the enterprise of citizens of Huelva might do."

"Should the vessels," it was asked, "proceed from Huelva to San Salvador, in imitation of the course pursued by Columbus, and as suggested by Señor Castelar?"

"That would be making a parody of the celebration," answered the Queen, who appeared to take a deep interest in the conversation and asked many questions regarding what she thought would be a most interesting anniversary.

"No, it would not be a parody," continued the King, "except in the sense that all celebrations are parodies. The festivity of an anniversary, contrasted with the solemnity of the event itself, often looks like a parody. But the idea of Señor Castelar is an excellent one. In fact, the more I think of the proposed celebration, the more interested in it I am, and I will certainly do what is possible to make it a decided success."

The King talked for half an hour, and showed beyond

question that he took a genuine interest in the subject. He realized that Spain should take the initiative. At the proper time the question would be brought up, and he hoped the celebration might be as significant as is warranted by the grand achievement of Christopher Columbus.

MADRID, *Thursday, May 3d, 1883.*

THE FOURTH CENTENARY OF AMERICA.

From The Independent, May 31, 1883.

Our readers will find on the first and second pages a communication, by Mr. Clarence Winthrop Bowen, on Columbus, and what leading men in Spain think as to the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America.

These reports give formal conversations on the subject with the Director-General of Public Instruction and the Arts, with the present representative of the family of Columbus, the Duke of Veragua, with the parliamentary leader, Emilio Castelar, and with the King and Queen, procured, with this special end in view, by Mr. Reed, our *Chargé d'Affairs* at Madrid.

Mr. Bowen's report, so far as we know, is the first public suggestion of a matter which, nine years hence, is likely to be attracting a good deal more notice in the world than now. This publication of the opinions of the most august and responsible personages in Spain brings the matter up in the best possible way. Nor is it premature. Many things would have to be considered, as one can at once see by looking over these reports in our columns. Nobody expects Spanish opinion nowadays to

be unanimous, but there is, rather more than the usual amount of characteristic difference in the highly-interesting opinions collected by our correspondent.

They all agree in this, that the commemoration should take place and that Spain should take the initiative in it.

This is not likely to be disputed; not, at least, as far as Europe is concerned. Italy has a personal interest in Columbus as his birth-place; but it is not Columbus who is to be commemorated, but a certain achievement of his. The personal facts of his history do not come into prominence in such a commemoration, and, therefore, Italy falls out of the question. Portugal has little to claim except that Columbus cast anchor in her waters on his first return. The fact and event of the discovery can be commemorated in one demonstration nowhere so well as in Spain herself; in Madrid, the head and representative of the monarchy; in Granada where the project which resulted in the discovery was resolved on; or in Barcelona, where the full-blown announcement of the achievement was made.

But such a commemoration has a history as well as an event to dwell on, and it is the history whose reflex light throws all the luster it possesses into the event. The discovery of America would not be the epoch it is in the world's history had it not turned out, in the four hundred years that followed, that America was a thing worth discovering.

The gold that Spain got out of it is not a thing that the world cares to remember, nor one that Spain herself would have any special pride in. So that, while to Spain belongs the honor of the discovery, it is America herself that has made that discovery to shine with luster in the Spanish crown. And America has for the most part wrought out her own history on her own soil with her own hands, and the better part of it by following her own counsels.

All of this gives her rights in this matter which cannot be set aside, though it is remarkable that only Señor

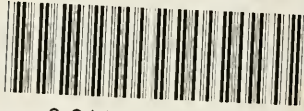
Castelar seems, in these reports, to recognize them. He apparently has the better view of what is due to the makers of America and of her history. Our readers will agree with the King of Spain that his suggestions are excellent.

The living interest of such a commemoration must be American. But the whole world meet in such celebrations, Italy, Portugal, France; and even Iceland can remember that the great Admiral was once in her ports, and may have heard there, to fire and guide his speculations, some vague traditions of the voyages of Biorn and Lief, and of the pleasant coasts of Vineland and Hallelund. There is nothing nobler in the life of man than these commemorations. They redeem us from the poor doubt that the world's life is not worth living. They make us feel its substantial gains and the grand movement of history in obedience to the "heart of good" that lies at its center.

At all events the commemoration must be had, and, without doubt, will be. To make it worthy of the event, and a solid step forward in the interest of the world's peace and prosperity, these suggestions from Spain come none too soon.



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